

## Letters to the Editor

### A NEW LIFE FOR THE MILITIA

#### MECHANIZED LOCAL LEVIES

##### TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—The recent letter in your columns from Major Ernest Cooper setting forth the origins and traditions of the Militia leads a younger generation to an appreciation of what the Militia stood for and was, and what, in modern times, a revived Militia might become. The day of the purely local unit seemed over for ever, and, with the virtual disappearance of the mounted Yeomen from the countryside, all local and strictly country contribution to the defence of the realm seemed dead: most dead of all, the old Militia.

But with altered circumstances and requirements, above all with the new possibilities offered by mechanization and mobility, has not the wheel, with unexpected and startling momentum, turned full cycle? Surely a revived Militia, mechanized and mobile, could play a part, and a great one, in the defence of England?

The young man of village and farm remains largely untouched by Territorial recruiting: to cycle 10 or 15 miles to company headquarters after a long day at plough or at harvest, to drill with "strangers," this makes no appeal to him. But give him the chance to join a small, entirely local unit, officered by men he knows (and there are in the country many retired officers from both Services, for whom also the Territorial Army has no place)—give him this chance, and the response would be overwhelming.

The peoples of Europe are being trained in the use of arms as never before and on a scale unprecedented in history: our reply has been the speeding up of armaments, and by persuasion and blandishment the fostering—alas! all too unsuccessfully—of recruiting for the Territorial Army. It is not enough.

The Territorial Army, with all its merits in urban areas, fails completely to meet the needs of the countryside. If the defence of England is to be seriously and nationally undertaken and accomplished, then the basis of recruiting and training must have far broader and more popular foundations.

Conscription has never been in the English tradition: nor has a large standing army. The bowmen of Crecy, highly skilled as they were, the levies and "train bands" of Elizabeth to meet another danger, these were indeed local levies in the English tradition; and the Militia, not the Regular Forces of the Crown, was their national inheritor.

Let power and authority be again given to-day to the Lords Lieutenant to raise and administer a modernized Militia in

the counties of England. Small units, even village units, could be formed consisting of mobile machine guns, an armoured car, mobile signal and wireless sections, searchlight sections, here and there a mobile anti-aircraft gun. These highly trained and specialized units could mobilize literally with the speed of a fire brigade and could concentrate where required with lightning rapidity. Mechanics are already in the countryman's blood, and so is patriotism, especially local patriotism. The possibilities of the scheme are enormous, and it is by no means impracticable. To a far greater extent than is possible with infantry or cavalry, the individual training of small mechanized units can be carried out alone and without the need of constant work in formations.

Instructional units would travel the country for demonstration purposes and periodical inspection.

There is no doubt that, given the mechanized material and the county organization (the human stuff is already there), small mobile Militia units of first-class efficiency could be formed, and formed all over England. Such a Militia could be raised with a minimum of disturbance to the life of the countryside, and a weapon could be forged, built up of a million molecules, strong as steel. One mobile machine gun alone in each of a thousand villages in England—what a weapon in case of need!

The Dictators of Europe would take pause to see the arming of the English countryside after the manner of its age-long tradition in time of emergency and danger; they might well wonder that the shirts of the Militiamen were of colours as various as the hues of Joseph's coat and their politics as diverse.

Nevertheless, if and when the sirens sound over London, the expert man behind gun and searchlight might well be he—that Militiaman who six hours before had ploughed his furrow of Suffolk soil or shepherded his sheep on high Cotswold.

May the countryman not have his chance?

I am, Sir, your obedient servant,  
R. J. GUNTHER.  
Withington, Gloucestershire, Oct. 26.

#### FREAK SHOTS

##### TO THE EDITOR OF THE TIMES

Sir,—When Parliament meets again will turn your attention to more matters than shooting stories. These are getting "curiouser and curiouser" but can you beat this?

A herd of elephants were fe  
slope which ended in a st  
above them a man armed  
licher, the smallest spor  
a single shot at the r  
and in rolling down  
him, and all thr  
bottom of the c  
I am writin  
ence, but th  
ago in the  
African